

Let's look at how that works in three important marketplace configurations.

DIGITAL MARKETPLACE

Online Retention

We're so connected now that it's hard not to start the research phase right from our own sofa. Evidence of this is found in Wolfgang Digital's research result that mobile sessions accounted for 59% of all sessions by device on e-commerce sites. But just because we start on our phone, doesn't rule out the occasional desire to visit a store—for further consideration, or to purchase the product. Today, consumers want convenience and choices, from researching products online to purchasing online, and then having the item shipped to home or pulled for local in-store pickup.

Your brand's website and e-commerce site should be designed with this diversity in mind. Make sure all content is centered on driving the overall brand experience. Here are four ideas that can help fuel a great experience in the customer awareness and research phase:

1. Stay Relevant

Employ a strategic inbound marketing plan to increase your chances of showing up in the top Google search results. Create rich content on your site, whether through SEO writing or an active blog, as it will help keep your customers

tuned in to your brand and your product offerings. Use this opportunity to express the compelling truths of your brand. Consumers today want to connect with authentic brands.

2. The Simple Sell

The design of your site should be clean and clutter free. Don't make visitors work for content. Instead, allow easy access to product descriptions and reviews so browsing experiences are focused on what makes your products stand out. Remind shoppers which of their local retail stores carry your products. Better still, offer online purchase with in-store pick up.

3. The Big Picture

Make sure your products are showcased beautifully and clearly reflect your brand's image. Excellent photography goes a long way, especially online. Be empathetic to the fact that visitors aren't able to touch and feel your products at this stage. If it's velvety soft, say so. Cool to the touch? Mention it. If you have great packaging, don't be afraid to show it off! It's a great opportunity to connect your online visitors with your products in physical retail locations.

Take a look at S'well, a company that creates reusable aluminum bottles with a goal of eliminating plastic bottles. Not a new concept by any means, until S'well put a fashion forward spin on it. Their site grabs your attention immediately with its clean design and beautiful product



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photography. The shop page has a great filter tool for quickly finding and exploring potential purchases. There's even rich content developed on a regular basis through a blog titled, "Stories". S'well connects with potential and existing customers via the blog by talking about artist collaborations with the products and insights to the brand. Yet another way to infuse authenticity and truth into the brand experience.

4. Social Influence

After you've made an impression, most consumers will look for validation as they consider both your brand and your product. PwC stated that in 2016 that, "78% of consumers were influenced by social media". As a retail brand today, actively utilizing social media is important to staying relevant with your customers. What's more, keeping your customers active on your social channels can organically grow your brand's awareness and appeal even more.

Consider Urban Outfitters. This company does a great job promoting their products through their Instagram feed and their UOCommunity feed right inside their native app. Bold colors, unique laydowns of product, and emotive travel photography all relate back to the brand and its visual experience at retail. Urban Outfitters uses their channel to create a bridge between their digital audience and their in-store audience. Upon entering the store, shoppers are asked to log into their app, prompting notifications as they move through the store. Then shoppers have the ability to upload and share outfits right from the changing room for immediate approval from friends before making that perfect purchase.

What's great about this idea is that it doesn't stop once the consumer leaves the store. The social sharing continues, likely driving more sales online by the same shopper or by one of his or her friends who shared the experience through social media.

PHYSICAL MARKETPLACE

Great Packaging

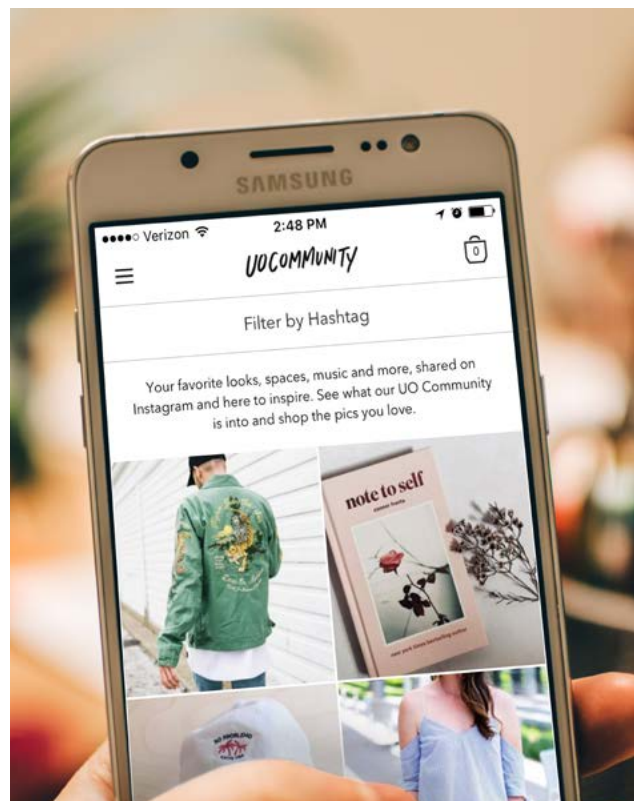
Good packaging sells the product. Great packaging sells the brand. Once you get consumers in the store, a primary

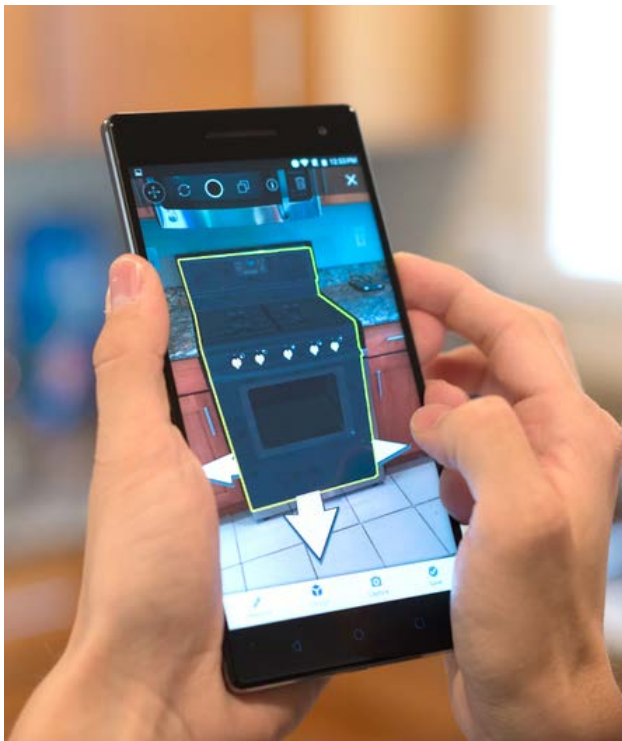
component of your brand's experience is found in the product packaging. When done well, it not only represents the fabulous product inside, but it also sells the consumer on the brand's purpose and promise. Packaging can help reinforce what a consumer has already taken from your web, mobile, and social experience.

Packaging is certainly the most intimate experience a consumer has with your brand. It holds more power than most other variables, as it's a touchpoint that's hard to ignore. A consumer can block or ignore ads online when browsing the web. They can choose to unfollow your brand on social media. But in brick-and-mortar retail environments, consumers considering a purchase can't help but interact with the packaging. So how do you as a manufacturer prompt this interaction?

1. Be Disruptive

Everything from color, to photography, to structure can disrupt and help create a lasting impression in the consumer's mind. When each item is perfectly tuned in to the brand's core values, that can result in a pretty amazing consumer experience. Create excitement and the need to have the product. For instance, if your brand is an innovative leader, make your product packaging reflect this and stand out in a sea of similarity.





2. Deliver Emotion

When your online and social experience is on point and properly setting the tone for your brand story, your packaging should act as the final payoff. It should tug on the heart strings that were so artfully teed up prior to walking into the store. Carry the message, keeping it seamless from your online experience to your packaging experience.

3. Keep Them Engaged

Once your packaging sells and is in the hands of the consumer, keep it going. Make packaging that's also a container. Something the consumer keeps around. Or offer that hidden "Easter egg" message that they only discover after they get home from the store. It could be as simple as a thank you message on an inner flap or an enticing note to reengage online or on social media. This can start the buying cycle all over again.

A BLENDED MARKETPLACE

Interactive Retail

There's another component of a great retail brand experience that's been gaining traction lately. Nick Baird of Retail Systems Research said, "The compelling opportunity for retailers is in blending the best of what the digital realm has to offer with the best that the physical realm delivers."

Technology continues to improve, opening new doors for what's possible, both online and at brick-and-mortar stores.

One way to create a continuous brand experience is to hold onto the digital engagement in retail stores by marrying digital to physical. We touched on this briefly with the idea of Urban Outfitters encouraging social sharing in stores. But what about the next level? How can you continue to engage with your customers in the digital space, while further encouraging sales at brick-and-mortar sites?

One brand taking a shot at this is Lowe's. As a weekend destination for the home improvement DIYer, Lowe's understands the struggles of finding the right product to fit your changing space. Over the last couple of years they've developed Lowe's Vision. Currently still in beta, it's an app for Google's 3D smartphone platform Tango. It allows users to see how some products look in their home through the use of augmented reality. Once consumers find a fit, they can save products to their MyLowe's account. When they enter a Lowe's store, they can find the exact in-aisle location of those products. The app can even push additional content like reviews and product descriptions to help shoppers cross the bridge from consideration to purchase.

Evidence shows that building brand equity across multiple channels is a vital factor to creating a truly unique and rewarding retail experience. Always value how you express your brand's purpose and promise in both the digital and physical space to make sure you're consistent across both channels. Doing so will create a seamless and meaningful experience for your customers. One that will have them coming back for your brand experience over anything else. ■



MEET PEYTON

Toting a BFA in Graphic Design from James Madison University, Peyton Green joined BOLTGROUP in November 2010, bringing over 10 years of print and identity design experience. He provides successful, creative solutions across several forms of media—from retail space design to packaging design—and innovates experiences through thoughtful brand execution and strategy.